

DOD FUNDING



Earlier this spring, the NAEVR *Defense-related Vision Research Opportunities Session* was held in person at the ARVO Annual Meeting, in Denver Colorado.

The session featured Department of Defense (DOD) Vision Research Program (VRP) Manager Q. Tian Wang, PhD, who spoke about the history and priorities of the VRP, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 awards that were recently selected by the VRP Program Committee, and the expected FY2022 VRP Program Announcement.

The VRP is one of 35 medical research programs managed by the DOD's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP). Since its establishment in FY2009 and through FY2020, the VRP has funded 135 projects for a total of \$133 million, with FY2021 awards currently being negotiated.

At NAEVR's session Dr. Wang emphasized that, unlike the National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant review process, CDMRP uses a two-tier review process—Peer Review first for scientific merit, and then Programmatic Review for military relevance, especially that which response to DOD-identified research gaps identified in the Program Announcement.

Dr. Wang noted that the Pre-Announcement for

the FY2022 VRP funding cycle was released on March 22 and the full Program Announcement was published in late May. The VRP is employing four award mechanisms: the Focused Translational Team Science Award (FTTSA), the Investigator-Initiated Research Award (IIRA, with two funding levels), the clinical Trial Award (CTA), and the Translational Research Award (TRA).

Since the VRP was first funded in FY2009, it has grown from \$5 million to currently FY2022 funding of \$20 million for FY2023, NAEVR and its allies are requesting that Congress fund the VRP at a level of \$30 million. DOD funding opportunities are available to domestic and international researchers and those who successfully navigate the VRP are more likely to be successful with other DOD programs.

After Dr. Wang's presentation, David Epstein, NAEVR's Director of Government Relations, moderated a panel of researchers — Tonia Rex, PhD (Vanderbilt University) and Joe Ciolino, MD (Schepens Eye Research Institute) — who spoke about their experiences in applying for funding from the VRP.

In addition to her appearance at NAEVR's session, Dr. Wang attended the ARVO Annual Meeting and met one-on-one with researchers from Sunday through Tuesday at a private table in the NAEVR booth. These meetings allowed researchers to discuss their ideas for projects and gauge the potential interest of the VRP.

On June 21, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense released its markup including funding for the CDMRP program and the Vision Research Program (VRP) is slated for level funding. NAEVR will continue to work with Congress to advocate for increasing CDMRP funding for the VRP.



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